

## ABORTION, INFANTICIDE, KILLING THE OLD 327

behind the church door, which, when the father was seventy, the son might fetch to knock his father on the head as effete and of no more use." Once in Iceland, in time of famine, it was decided by solemn resolution that all the old and unproductive should be killed. That determination was part of a system of legislation by which, in that country, the society was protected against superfluous and dependent members.<sup>2</sup>

**336.** Special exigencies of the civilized. Civilized men in certain cases find themselves face to face with the primitive circumstances, and experience the primeval necessity, which overrides the sentiments of civilization, whatever may be the strength of the latter. Colonel Fremont, in 1849, m a letter to his wife, tells how in crossing the plains he and his comrades left the weak and dying members of their party, one by one, to die in the snow, after lighting a little fire for him.<sup>3</sup> Many other such cases are known from oral narratives. The question is not one of more or less humanity. It is a question of the struggle for existence when at the limit of one of its conditions. Our civilization ordinarily veils from us the fact that we are rivals and enemies to each other in the competition of life. It is in such cases as the one just mentioned, or in shipwrecks, that this fact becomes the commanding one. The only alternative to the abandonment of one is the loss of all. Abortion, infanticide, and the killing of the old began at times when the competition of life was so direct and pitiless that it left no room for kindly sentiment. The latter is a product of civilization. It could be cultivated only by men for whom the struggle for existence was so easy, and the competition of life so moderate, that the severity was all taken out of them. Then there was a

surplus and the conditions of life were easy. The alternative was not murder or suicide. Such a state of ease was reached by migration or by advance in the arts, —in short, by greater command of man over nature. The fundamental elements in the case were altered.

<sup>1</sup> In the national museum at Stockholm is a large collection of flat clubs from all the churches in Sweden, the use of which is described with discretion. That the clubs were kept in the churches denotes that the act was put under religious sanction.

<sup>2</sup> Weinhold, *D. F.* II, 92.

<sup>3</sup> Thayer, *Marvels of the New West* ^ 231.